

What is claimed is:

1. A data processing system comprising:

a computing device having a memory and an expansion port; and

an electronic memory device including an image stored therein and configured to

be coupled to the expansion port, the image including data stored therein

that is loadable into the memory to configure the computing device.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the computing device further includes:

a connection network configured to provide a communications path;

a processor coupled to the connection network and configured to execute program

code; and

an input/output controller coupled to the connection network and to the expansion

port, the input/output controller configured to receive image data from the

electronic memory device and to load the image data into the memory

under control of the processor.
3. The system of claim 2, wherein the computing device further includes a flash
memory for storing the image data received from the electronic memory device.
4. The system of claim 1, wherein the electronic memory comprises one of a flash
memory mass storage device, a compact flash storage device, a universal serial bus flash
drive, an IEEE 1394 flash drive, and a removable mass storage device.
5. The system of claim 1, wherein the computing device comprises one of a thin
client, a workstation, a personal digital assistant, an electronic mail appliance, and a
server.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the computing device is configured to communicate with a network.
7. A computing device comprising:
 - a connection network configured to provide a communications path;
 - a memory coupled to the connection network and configured to store program code;
 - a processor coupled to the connection network and configured to execute the stored program code;
 - an expansion port configured to receive a storage device coupled thereto;
 - an input/output controller coupled to the connection network and to the expansion port, the input/output controller configured to receive image data from the storage device and to load the image data into the memory for execution by the processor.
8. The device of claim 7, further comprising:
 - a boot code module coupled to the connection network and configured to determine whether to boot the computing device from the storage device.
9. The device of claim 7, further comprising:
 - a boot code module coupled to the connection network and configured to acquire the image data from the storage device.
10. The device of claim 7, further comprising:
 - an application module coupled to the connection network and configured to store application program code; and

a configuration module coupled to the connection network and configured to
adjust parameters for the application module.

11. The device of claim 7, further comprising:

an update module coupled to the connection network and configured to update at
least a portion of the stored program code from the image data of the
storage device.

12. The device of claim 7, wherein the storage device comprises one of a flash
memory mass storage device, a compact flash storage device, a universal serial bus flash
drive, an IEEE 1394 flash drive, and a removable mass storage device.

13. A method for imaging a computing device from an attached storage device, the
method comprising steps of:

determining whether to boot the computing device from the attached storage
device;

responsive to the determining, executing boot code on the computing device to
acquire an image from the attached storage device; and

booting the computing device using the acquired image.

14. The method according to Claim 13, wherein the executing step further comprises
acquiring an image from the attached storage device which comprises a flash memory
mass storage device which is attached to the universal serial bus port.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein the determining step further comprises:

accessing an installed image in a memory of the computing device;

identifying the image on the attached storage device; and

comparing the identified image with the installed image.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein the determining step further comprises:
parsing the image on the attached storage device for a boot flag, wherein the boot
flag indicates at least one condition for booting the image; and
evaluating the at least one condition.
17. The method of claim 13, wherein the booting step further comprises:
loading the image from the attached storage device into a computing device
memory; and
determining whether the image requires authentication.
18. The method of claim 17, further comprising:
receiving authentication data from a user responsive to determining whether the
image requires authentication; and
decrypting the image using the authentication data.
19. A method for providing customized software for a computing device, the method
comprising steps of:
receiving a customer order for the computing device;
parsing the customer order to determine configuration data;
building an image using the configuration data; and
writing the image to a storage device, the storage device being distributable to the
customer.
20. The method of claim 19, wherein the receiving step further comprises:
obtaining the customer order from an order processing system.
21. The method of claim 19, wherein the building step further comprises:
obtaining at least one component from a database; and

- assembling the at least one component into the image.
22. The method of claim 19, wherein the building step further comprises:
generating a query to a configuration database based on the configuration data
from the customer order; and
receiving the image from the configuration database responsive to the query.
23. The method of claim 22, wherein the configuration database includes a plurality of stored images.
24. The method of claim 19, further comprising:
coupling the storage device to the computing device; and
booting the computing device from the image stored in the storage device.
25. The method of claim 19, further comprising:
packaging the storage device separate from the computing device for distribution
to the customer.
26. The method of claim 19, further comprising:
packaging the storage device with the computing device for distribution to the
customer.
27. The method of claim 19, wherein the storage device comprises one of a flash memory mass storage device, a compact flash storage device, a universal serial bus flash drive, an IEEE 1394 flash drive, and a removable mass storage device.
28. The method of claim 19, wherein the computing device includes boot code for accessing the image from the storage device and for producing a configured computing device.

29. A system for imaging a computing device from an attached storage device, the system comprising:

means for determining whether to boot the computing device from the attached storage device;

responsive to the determining means, means for executing boot code on the computing device to acquire an image from the storage device; and

means for booting the computing device using the acquired image.